

PLEASE FORWARD TODAY TO EVERYBODY
ON EVERY ONE OF YOUR EMAIL ROSTERS

DEAN'S REFLECTIONS

INTRODUCTION TO #7 + #8

My fellow Californians -

I want to call your attention to the enormous and frightening crisis we in California are facing, and urge you to immediately enlist yourself in a statewide crusade to address our crisis.

There is among most of us a growing sense that California is experiencing increasing division, growing chaos and grave peril as we move forward into the 21st century. Our continuing economic crisis, another dysfunctional state budget crisis produced by a severely divided Legislature, and now a recall election that presents us dozens of candidates arranged in no particular order - all these things both reflect and express a growing conviction that the institutions and people who lead and govern the State of California have lost their commitment to statesmanship, to a workable political process dedicated to realizing a good, just life for all of us.

But California's crisis is not simply about this economic moment, this particular state budget fiasco, or this Governor and the aspirants for his office. Our crisis is deep and historic, reflecting a culmination of events and previous political choices, all of which are now converging into what amounts to a Perfect Storm, descending upon the State of California. As a result, our state appears to be dysfunctional and ungovernable, our future dim, our very survival as a coherent political body doubtful.

Facing such a reality, the People of California require and deserve more than sound bites, snap elections, and simplistic answers to address our enormous crisis. The moment requires more than quick fixes of this element or that of our gathering storm. Instead, what's required is a smart comprehensive proposal and a workable process for moving it forward that are altogether sufficient to address each and all of the institutional constraints that bind us all, that make it virtually impossible for us to move forward.

As the Dean of the California Legislature, I have spent several months, indeed years, thinking through just how comprehensive and thorough a proposal for serious and truly effective change must be. I have spent years listening to legislative debate on particularly discreet elements of campaign and election law reform, economic reform, taxation reform, workers comp reform, term limits reform, and a host of other well-intentioned proposals, I have sadly watched them all

crash through the combined efforts of entrenched interests and fearful leaders. I have gained a strong sense of where our process of governing is weak, how it fails, and what could help it heal itself.

We have reached a point where we have no more time to lose, lest we lose the stability and capacity of the State of California to govern itself wisely, and to sustain its leadership in our nation and the world. We need bold smart corrective action now.

I have concluded that the moment requires putting before our people:

1st - a thoroughly objective analysis of what is threatening the State and People of California; +
2nd - a comprehensive constitutional amendment that will have serious impact on the many sources of dysfunction and stasis that plague our state. It must not be simplistic; it cannot be one-sided. It will not please many of the interests who win in the current environment.

We truly do not have any alternative - even though as yet few appear willing to admit that wholesale change is required. Denial is powerful, yet disastrous. Each and all of us here in our Capitol must become statespersons, all of our constituents must become alert, informed and engaged if we are to have any hope of overcoming our enormous crisis.

In my experience, there are seven essential steps to addressing any social problem of the magnitude that is now facing California:

1. We must recognize that we have a continuing problem of depth and enormity, not a momentary blip in an otherwise healthy situation.
2. We must own up to our own role—as voters, citizens, and/or leaders in having helped create the crisis, and we must accept that no one else will fix it but ourselves.
3. We have to fully commit to solving our crisis, in all its magnitude, and take responsibility for developing an effective solution.
4. We must unpack our crisis and analyze its full complexity, so as to identify each and all of the elements contributing to it, for we must address each and all of them if we are to succeed in overcoming our crisis.
5. We have to search out root causes, not short-term expressions, of each of these underlying elements.
6. We must recognize that no problem can be solved by solutions that derive from the same system of thinking that created them.
7. We must step back, gain perspective, and then advance a comprehensive strategic proposal, together with identifying the political processes essential to advance it.

Next, if we are to succeed, it's going to take truly fine leadership and thoroughgoing collaboration by all of us, both here in the Capitol, and throughout our state. We are all in this together, and we will only succeed if and insofar as we all come together, and together commit ourselves to a real solution.

Toward those ends, in the next two weeks, I will be presenting two comprehensive documents for the consideration and, hopefully, favorable action by my colleagues, and by the People of California:

DEAN'S REFLECTION #7
FACING 13 STRIKES
CALIFORNIA IS RAPIDLY BECOMING
A DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY!

DEAN'S REFLECTION #8
A 12-STEP RECOVERY PROGRAM
FOR A 13-STRIKE STATE -
RESTORING DEMOCRACY TO CALIFORNIA!

I will then be doing everything within my power and talent to bring together all the crucial decision-makers to work together in a conducive environment.

Why am I doing this now? Why now, in the face of an overheated political scene dominated by the Recall? And why me?

Somebody has to stand up and speak out for the long-term and the long-run well-being of the People and State of California. Somebody has to get the ball rolling, not allow our people to be distracted or seduced by the silly notion that any Recall will solve anything, or that one small proposal or another will suffice.

As California's senior State Senator who is going to be termed out of office next year, I believe I have the most to share and the least to lose. Whatever risk I face pales in comparison to my hopes of helping lead California to overcome our crisis.

In addition, I am deeply motivated and blessed by my "adopted" Saunders family - Mitch (whom I met through my work in politics) and Cindy; Megan, 13; and Briana, 8. I find myself wanting to do everything I can, before I retire next year from the Legislature, to assure they can look forward to a California that is 1st - a healthy and prosperous state - and a safe, decent and competitive state.

Yet, this challenge will certainly take far more than one sitting legislator proposing one constitutional amendment. It is going to require broad leadership from a diverse set of Californians. It will take the willingness of citizens to recognize and accept our need for broad-scale change, to rise up and demand a promising scheme be put on the ballot for them to approve, and then their voting to approve it.

I have invested my life in service to California, have served her people through 37 legislative years, and have spent much time and energy grappling with her problems. I really do understand how the current system works, and why it does not.

My constituents know me well; they have elected me to represent them 17 times and I am glad to invest myself in calling for a whole-hearted bold smart comprehensive effort to solve the historic crisis we face, to save our beloved State of California.

I am a native Californian, have resided here all my life (except for my service in the Army in Germany). I am the product of both public and private schools. I was mentored by California's greatest ever governor, Edmund G. 'Pat' Brown. I was first elected to the State Assembly in 1966, and to the State Senate in 1996. I have represented Silicon Valley and her many diverse people for 37 years.

For 15 of those years I chaired the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, so I know the politics of California's budget as well as any legislator. I chaired the first two reviews of California's Master Plan for Higher Education, developed the first comprehensive legislative ethics package, and devoted years to leading my fellow Democrats toward a deep appreciation of our state's economy, and how totally interdependent our California private and public sectors have become in our modern times.

Altogether, I have been remarkably privileged to be elected (17 times by my Silicon Valley constituents), and to serve the People and State of California. In light of that privilege, my passion and my commitment, my experience, and my capacity and my passion, I will next proceed to propose these two major documents regarding how the State of California conducts its elections, raises its taxes, governs its economy and operates our government.

I urge you - each and all of my colleagues and our state constitutional officers, and every one of you California citizens - to join me in an open mature smart collaborative search for radical improvement, and a search for the ways and means that truly assure the future well-being of the People and the State of California.

I welcome your response, your critique and your partnership. Together, we must succeed, altogether we will succeed. After all, this is our California, it is our history, our California destiny and our California spirit to tackle huge challenges. Altogether, that ought well inspire us to succeed!

JOHN VASCONCELLOS
Dean of the California Legislature
Representing the Heart of Silicon Valley
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